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DISCOURSE

ON

FAMILY-PRAYER:

Being the Substance

Of Several

SERMONS

Preach'd to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, near Dock-Head in Southwark.

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L O N D O N:

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THE P R E F A C E.

THE Importunity of Friends is the usual Apology made for publishing Sermons ; if I thought it would be of any Service to these, I would make the same Excuse ; but I chuse rather to leave the Importance of the Subject to answer for its publication. The Sermons, of which the ensuing Discourse is the Substance, were preach'd above a Year ago, when I had no thoughts of printing them, and if I had no more regard to publick Usefulness, than my own private Interest, or Applause, they had not now seen the Light, but being sensible of the great Neglect of Family-Prayer in this Day, and finding but very few Treatises on the Subject, I resolv'd to venture them into the World. I have purposely Study'd Brevity and Plainness, that this Dis-

A 2

course

The Preface.

course might come Cheap, and be Read and Understood of all.

If it have any Influence either to provoke other Abler Hands to write more largely on the Subject, or to engage any Family to the practise of the Duty, my End is gain'd, and I shall never value the Sneers of prophane Men, nor the prating of others, who may censure my Zeal as an affected Forwardness to appear in print: But recommending the Work to the Blessing of God, shall quietly wait for its Success from Him who alone can make it truly Serviceable.

A Discourse on FAMILY-PRAYER.

JEREMIAH X. 25.

Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen that know thee not, and upon the Families that call not on thy Name.



THESE Words are part of the Prophet's Prayer for himself, and People. He was under melancholy apprehensions of the wrath of God falling upon a foolish and idolatrous Generation of Men; and accordingly, he not only endeavours to shew them the Vanity of Idols, their Makers, and Worshippers, and exhorts them to prepare for the desolating Judgments which God was bringing upon them: But under the Metaphor of a Tabernacle, whose Cords or Fastnings were broken, he laments the deplorable Condition both of the City and Country, which thro' the wretched prophaneness of their Governors and Teachers, were devoted to inevitable Ruine.

Under

Under the frightful prospect of which sad Calamities, he sends up that Prayer to God, of which our Text is one Petition, *Ver. 23, 24, 25.* *O Lord, I know that the way of Man is not in himself: it is not in Man that walks to direct his steps.*

q. d. ‘ O Lord, I am sensible that it is not in
 ‘ our Power either to annul or alter thy Decrees;
 ‘ it is not in our Power to overcome or secure our
 ‘ selves from our Enemies: It is not in our Power
 ‘ to divert those Judgments that are coming upon
 ‘ us, nor is it in our Enemies Power to do as
 ‘ they please; they can’t act at *Discretion*, nor or-
 ‘ der their own March. But all our Security is of
 ‘ Thee, all our Enemies Designs are under thy
 ‘ Controul, and all their Hearts are in thy Hands.
 ‘ Thou canst frustrate all their Machinations,
 ‘ and turn backward all their united Forces, they
 ‘ cannot do any thing without thy permission;
 ‘ and therefore, tho’ tis not in our power to
 ‘ divert the Judgments that hang over our Heads,
 ‘ yet thou canst either moderate or prevent ‘em
 ‘ as thou pleas’st. So much I conceive to be in-
 ‘ cluded in what the Prophet says, *ver. 23.* and
 ‘ this seems to be favour’d by what follows, *ver. 24.*
O Lord, correct me, but with Judgment; not in thine
Anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. As the Pro-
 ‘ phet had all along Personated the People of *Is-*
 ‘ *rael*, so here he goes on, in himself, to represent
 ‘ their Case to God; *O Lord, correct me, &c.* As if
 ‘ he should argue thus with God. ‘ O Lord, if
 ‘ thou art determin’d to let our Enemies in up-
 ‘ on us, to punish our Refractoriness and Disobe-
 ‘ dience; let it be in Measure, don’t stir up all
 ‘ thy Wrath against us. But in the midst of Judg-
 ‘ ment remember Mercy. Proportion our Suf-
 ‘ ferings to our Circumstances, and lay no more
 ‘ on us than thou wilt enable us to bear. Let not
 ‘ our

' our Enemies have all their Will upon us, but
 ' tho' they may insult and harrafs us, let 'em not
 ' destroy us. Tho' our Name may be reckon'd
 ' evil among 'em, let us not come to utter Ru-
 ' ine. We know we deserve to be Corrected, and
 ' we dare not refuse it; but, Lord, let it be in
 ' Mercy, do not in thine Anger, shut up thy
 ' tender Compassions, lest we be desolate, and
 ' come to nothing. If thou should'st give our
 ' Enemies all their Will, they would lay us waste,
 ' and make an utter end of us, so that we shall
 ' never be able again to lift up our Heads; there-
 ' fore abhor us not for thy Name sake. O Lord,
 correct me, &c.

But, it follows, *pour out thy Fury upon the Hea-then, &c.*

q. d. ' Lord, if thou wilt pour out thy Fury,
 ' and cause thine Anger to wax hot, let it not
 ' be upon thy own People, those that Worship
 ' thee, and call on thy Name; but let it be on
 ' the Heathen, who know thee not, and upon
 those who call not on thy Name.

Pour out thy Fury, &c.

The Words may be consider'd, either as a *Pe-
 tition*, or *Prediction*. As a Request to God for
 what he desired might come to pass, or a Pro-
 phesy of what he knew would come to pass,
 * and afterwards did actually come to pass.

Pour out thy Fury, &c. either I pray that thou
 wouldest, or I know that thou wilt pour out thy
 Fury.

Upon the Heathen that know thee not.

Who either have no knowledge of thee, as the
 only True God, or who will not own and serve

* Vid. towards the latter end of Jeremiah's Prophecy's.

thee as such ; for in both these Senses, the Term Know is frequently taken, who know thee not, thro' gross Ignorance ; who will not own thee, thro' their wretched Baseness and Obstinacy.

Upon the Families that call not on thy Name.

There is a Synecdoche in the Words, by which a part is put for the whole, or calling on the Name of God, is made to comprize all Religious Worship. The Words, *upon the Families*, may be consider'd as distinct from the former, or explanative of them. If we take them to be only exegetical, they may be suppos'd to run thus: Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen that know thee not ; the Families, or which are the Families that call not on thy Name. If you consider the Words, as a distinct Proposition from the former, they may be thus read ; Pour out thy Fury upon the Heathen that know thee not, and pour out thy Fury upon the Families that call not on thy Name.

From the Words I observe,

1. That Prayer is the Life and Sum of all Religious Worship.

By calling on God's Name, I take for granted, is meant Prayer, and this is the very Life of Religion, the proper Language of a regenerate Soul ; a Man cannot be a Christian that lives without it ; he that does not Pray, never was renew'd, is not born from above. It's the very breath of a new born Creature, *behold he prayeth!* Acts ix. 11. I don't say Prayer will Save a Man ; no, many Pray oft, who will fall short at last, as the *Pharisees*, &c. but then without Prayer, I don't see how a Person or Family can be Saved. Again, I wou'd not be supposed to insinuate, that Prayer must serve for all Worship ; no, we must Hear, and Partake, as well as Pray ; but there

there can be no Spiritual Worship without Prayer; for as the Apostle * says of the Creatures of God, so I may say of the Ordinances of God, they are *Sanctify'd by the Word, and Prayer.*

2. From the Connection in the Words, I observe, that Prayerless Families, are really worse than Heathen ones.

A Heathen he knows no God, but a Prayerless Christian, (if it be not an Absurdity to call any one so) though he knows God, yet denies him that Worship, which he both requires, and deserves. Do you hear this you Prayerless Persons and Families? wou'd to God that every one here did well consider it; we should not then, I believe, have so many Persons and Families that live from Day to Day without Prayer. What, a Heathen! no Body loves to be accounted so, but so it is, and worse if our Text be true. I beseech you think of it.

3. I observe, that as God will pour out his Fury upon the Heathens, so upon all Prayerless Families,

Psalms ix. 17. *The Wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the Nations (or People) that forget God. They who know not God, and they who Worship him not, are equally abominable in God's Eye, and shall be punish'd. It is not Knowledge and a Name that will Save, but Faith, which works by Love.*

It is a thing somewhat to be wonder'd at, that many, otherwise very sober Persons, and who seem to have some sense of Religion too, yet never it may be, in their whole Lives, call'd their Families together to pray to God with

* 1 Tim. iv. 5.

them, and for 'em. Those that have liv'd with them, can give them the Character of Sober, good Humor'd, Honest, but, whether they be Christians, or Atheists, they can't tell; as to Religion, they never saw any they had. I wish that such wou'd consider the Disreputation and Danger they expose themselves and Families to, by such a scandalous Neglect of their Duty to God.

You'll observe a strange difference in Persons as to this Duty of Prayer. Some make no Conscience at all of it, live in the entire Neglect of it both as publick, private, and secret, neither practise it in the Church, their Families, or their Closets; these are really *Prophane*. Others attend Prayer in the Church, but neglect it both in their Families, and Closets; these I may reckon *Formalists*, and *Outside Worshipers*. † others they make Family and Closet-Prayer, to serve in the room of publick Prayer, such affect to be called *Private Christians*; as tho' a Christian, was oblig'd to no other Worship, but that in his own private House. Others they make Family and Closet-Prayer interchangeably to exclude and interfere with one another; these I am at a loss what to call. But there are others, who make their Prayers a sort of Atonement for their Sins, and when they seem to be strict Observers of this Duty, are under no ties of Conscience in their Dealings with their Fellow Creatures, but think their Prayers will atone for all their Fraud, Dishonesty, and Tricking, and make amends for their scandalous Lives. These are *Sinners* but in disguise, and real *Hypocrites*, who do more Dis-service, and bring more Discredit to Religion, than

† Mat. xxiii. 27, 28.

those who never Pray at all. But a true Christian, he attends to Prayer, both publick, private, and secret, and he lives as well as prays to God. I propose not here to speak of Prayer under all these Characters, but consider it as a principal part of Family-Worship, and with this view, speak to this Proposition, as contain'd in the words of our Text.

Prayerless Families do expose themselves to the Fury and Curse of God.

In speaking from this Proposition, I design, thro' Divine Assistance,

1. To say something as to the Nature of Prayer in general.
2. To shew the Danger of neglecting it in Families, or how it exposeth them to God's Fury.
3. To recommend the Practise of it in Families.
4. Answer Objections against it.
5. Apply.

As to the first of these, the Nature of Prayer in general, I shall sum up what I have to say in these following Heads,

1. God, as he is the Object of all Divine Worship, is particularly and especially so of Prayer.
2. Prayer is a natural Duty.
3. In consequence, 'tis binding upon all, of all Nations, Degrees, and Denominations.

4. It must be from the Heart.

It's called a *lifting up the Soul to God*, Psal. xxv. 1.

5. It must be for things agreeable to the Will of God ; so that his holy Word must be our Rule in Prayer.

6. As it is a Representation of our Desires to God, so we should labour after suitable Expressions, neither flat nor flaunting, too lax, nor too nice.

7. It's a defective Prayer which has not Confession and Thanksgiving in it.

8. It must be made in the Name of Christ.

9. The Assistance of the Spirit is absolutely necessary to our Praying as we ought.

10. We must look to the manner how we Pray ; that it be with Seriousness, Faith, due Fervor, Love, Understanding, and humble Submission to the Will of God.

11. We must look up to God, and patiently wait an Answer of our Prayers.

These Hints, I conceive, do sufficiently shew, in general, what Prayer is, and how it ought to be perform'd.

I am in the 2d place to shew you the Danger of neglecting Prayer in Family's, and how it exposeth them to God's Fury.

This

This is a Matter that should be very seriously weigh'd and consider'd ; it's a dreadful thing to fall into the Hands of the Living God. To be under his Curse ! this is worse than Death, and carries in it all the Miseries you are capable of conceiving.

Give me leave to explain this Head in these following Propositions.

I. Prayer is an Institution of God.

Phil. iv, 6. *Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto God.* So 1 Thes. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.* Again 1 Tim. ii. 8. *I will that Men pray every where.* Accordingly, we find it was a Duty observ'd in the Primitive Times, the Apostles of Christ *continue with one accord in prayer and supplications*, Acts i. 14. *the 3000 Converted by Peter's Sermon, they continue in Prayer*, Acts ii. 42, Now what God has commanded, let not Man neglect.

II. Prayer is a Duty that has many Promises annex to it.

We are obliged to Pray, because God has required it ; we are encourag'd to it from the Promise. A Promise to the performance of a Duty, is a very powerful Motive, and we have many, in relation to the Duty under consideration, James iv. 8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.* Mat. vii. 7, 8. *Ask and it shall be given you, &c.* Hence were are told Jam. v. 16. *that the Prayer of a Righteous Man availeth much.*

III. There

III. There are, no doubt, many secret Blessings that come by Prayer to us, many positive, many preventive. I have oft thought, that Men don't really consider how many Blessings they have, as the Fruit of Prayer. They either don't see their Mercies, or attribute them to some other Reason, or Means. But, sure I am, Prayer brings down many Blessings on us, which otherwise, we should go without; and therefore I esteem it no inconsiderable Advantage, to have the Prayers of faithful Friends put up for one, especially when in Danger. Accordingly, we find under the persecution of *Herod*, when *Peter* was put in Prison, *that the Church prayed without ceasing for him*, and God in answer to their Prayers, did miraculously set him at Liberty, *Acts* xii. 5. to 11. The Apostle *Paul* was very sensible of the Blessings of Prayer, when he told *Philemon*, in his Epistle to him, *I trust that thro' your Prayers I shall be given unto you*, ver. 22 of that Epistle. Persons therefore should be cautious how they engage in any Affair of Importance, without desiring the Prayers of others. This is the Duty and Privilege, especially of Church-Members, and may and ought to be observ'd and claim'd by them of the Church.

IV. We lose many Blessings by restraining Prayer. As we receive many Mercies by it, so we are deprived of many for want of it; *James* assigns this as the Reason why Persons have no more from God, either *because they don't ask, or ask amiss*, *James* iv. 2, 3. God knows his Peoples wants, and has promis'd to supply them, but he expects we Petition him for it. We find when God had made large Promises to *Israel*, that he

he insisted upon being ask'd for the making of them good, *Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the House of Israel, to do it for them.*

V. Family-Prayer is undoubtedly a very great Duty.

This is what God in his Word has required, see *Phil. iv. 6. 1 Thes. v. 17. 1 Tim. ii. 8. Mal. i. 11. Eph. vi. 18.* Here we have Prayer at all Times, in all Places, and of all sorts, urged as a Duty; wherefore, if Scripture consequence be a good Argument, *Family-Prayer*, as coming under these Heads, must be a Duty.

Again, you have the practise of the Saints in all Ages to confirm this. *Abraham built an Altar in his House unto the Lord, Gen. xii. 7, 8. Jacob built a Family - Altar to God, Gen. xxxv. 2, 3. Joshua resolves that he and his House would serve the Lord, Josh. xxiv. 15. Thus David blest his Household, by Prayer offered to God for and with his Family, 2 Sam. vi. 20. Job's continually presenting Offerings to the Lord for his Children, seems to be a Family-Worship, Job i. 5. without all doubt Daniel's praying in his House three times a Day, was Family-Prayer, Dan. vi. 10. Cornelius had this Character, that he feared God with all his House, and prayed to God always, Acts x. 2 yea, from that time to this, the best Christians have conscientiously regarded Family-Prayer: but*

Farther, Governors are charged with their Families, and must give an Account to God of them; all the Souls in the House are the proper Charge of the Master, wherefore he ought to Pray with them, and for them.

Besides,

Besides, there are Family-Cases to be daily presented to the Lord: Family-Sins to be confess'd, and bewail'd, Wants to be supply'd, Mercies to be owned, &c. which call for Prayer, and make, as I conceive, the Attendance of the Family very necessary. No Family is above Wants, wherefore none should be without Prayer.

VI. God will resent the Neglect of Family-Prayer, *and will pour out his Fury on all the Families that call not on his Name.*

This, I think, requires no Proof, for if our Text be a *Prophecy*, as well as a *Petition*, as most allow it to be, then it self confirms what I have asserted; our Business then is to enquire, in what respects, or how God will pour out his Fury upon them. *Pour out thy Fury*, it's a dreadful Prediction; it is not common Anger or wrath, but Fury, the very height of Anger, unmixed Wrath, there is no Alloy of Pity, nor can any be able to ward it off, *Ezek. viii. 18. Its unmeasurable Wrath, Fury poured out, Jer. vii. 20.* they shall be under abundance and variety of Troubles, it shall fall upon 'em as strong showers from Heaven, his fierce Wrath shall overwhelm them, they can be no more able to stand under it, than they are to stand against it; twill be an overflowing Torrent, a Fire that cannot be put out. It's called *Anger with Fury, rebuke with Flames of Fire, Isa. lxvi. 15.* If this Judgment was now executed upon all Prayerless Families, Lord, what an universal *Bochim* would this Land be! who cou'd bear the weeping noise of the punished! but to be more particular,

1. In this World God will pour out his Fury on them, he will write bitter things against them, and as the Fruit of his Indignation and Wrath, bring 'em under very greivous Troubles ; such a Family shall be a Family of Affliction, and the Head, Master and Parents of that Family shall more especially come under it. In their Persons sometimes God will afflict them with Sickness and Pain, and force them, thro' the violence of their Distress, to cry to him. Sometimes in their Relations, Children, Servants prove disobedient, troublesome, unkind, unnatural. Sometimes in their Affairs ; God disappoints them in their Designs, blasts their Endeavours, it may be reduces them to low Circumstances.

I don't say, that either God always thus punishes the neglect of Family-Worship, or that such Afflictions in Families are always the Fruit of Wrath, and Tokens of God's Displeasure upon this account. No, as God sometimes with-holds Punishment when 'tis really deserv'd, so he may in his Sovereignty (tho' seldom to shew that only, but for other good Reasons) sorely afflict even Praying-Families. But generally speaking, I may say 'tis the Prayerless Families that are the afflicted ones ; or if such do enjoy for a time outward Prosperity, they want a Blessing with it, and that's all in all. You *Prayerless Families*, does God thus Chastize you, bring Sickness and Death, Pain and Poverty into your Houses ? Oh ! learn the Lesson of such severer Providences, and, as you may have reason to fear, it is for the neglect of Family-Prayer, that God thus handles you ; no longer live in the wilful Omission of so necessary and useful a Duty.

2. In the World to come God will pour out his Fury upon them.

He whose House was not a Habitation for God on Earth, shall have no Mansion with him in Heaven ; those who kept at a Distance from God here, shall never approach him in his Kingdom above ; God won't know them another Day, who don't own him now. If God was kept out of your Families heré, you shall be kept out of his glorious Habitation above ; your Prayers then won't do, when you say, *Lord, Lord, open to us* ; the Answer will be, *Depart from me I know you not ; depart, ye cursed, into everlasting Burnings.* Thus such Sinners shall have both loss and pain, shall be debar'd the happy Vision and Fruition of God, and doom'd to Eternal Woe and Misery. Now, *consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver,* Psal. l. 22. God will not bear always with the prophane Impenitent Prayerless Families. *God is angry with the Wickd every day ; if he turn not he will whet his Sword, he has bent his Bow, and made it ready,* Psal. vii. 11, 12.. Now if God will thus deal with Wicked Persons, much more with Families.

3. I am now to recommend the practice of Family Prayer.

This I shall do by several Arguments.

I speak to Heads of Families principally, and pray mind.

1. Every House is or ought to be a Church, and every Head of a House a Priest.

This

This will sound harsh in some Peoples Ears, what a HOUSE a CHURCH! a LAYMAN a PRIEST! yes, the Word of God calls 'em so; look into *Rom. xvi. 5* *1 Cor. xvi. 19.* *Colos. iv. 15.* *Philem. 2.* What think you now? may not a House be a Church? This is incontestable matter of Fact. Now these Churches which you read of in these several Places, were either the Society of Christians, that were wont to meet to Worship God in those Houses, it being a time of Persecution with the Christians. The Church then wanted the encouragement of Civil Authority, and so they were glad to meet where they could; the Church in those Days was not bad enough to become a National establish'd one, and so it seems it was too good to be tolerated. But by the Church in the House, may be meant the Family call'd a Church, for the Religious Worship of God kept up among them; and oh! that every House was thus a Church: But if we were now to send Greetings as the Apostles did, alas! how few Churches in Houses, Churches with Chimneys should we find to send to. But tho' this be too true, every House ought to be a little Church; therefore God has condescended to two or three met together in his Name, to encourage, as I conceive, Family Worship. But then there is that which will look as strange to some Persons, every Master of a Family is, or ought to be a Priest. Now Priest and Altar are relative Terms, and mutually suppose one another: as there are then three sorts of Altars, so the Term Priest has a threefold acceptation, a Typical, Literal, and Metaphorical. The Typical Priests were of the Order of *Aaron*, and such were they who Sacrificed for the People under the Law; the

Literal Priest is but one, *Jesus Christ, a Priest for ever, after the Order of Melchisedeck.* All Christians are *Metaphorical Priests*, made so by Christ himself, the Arch-Priest, or great High-Priest. That in the *Levitical Times*, every Master of a House was Priest in his own Family, is generally granted, and seems very plain from *Exod. 12.* at the beginning. Nay, I don't find that 'till *Moses's* time they had any other Church but the Family, nor any other Priest, but the Head of the Family, who upon that account, I apprehend, was called a *Patriarch*. But to bring this down to Christian Times, and as there is but one proper Sacrifice in the Christian Church, so there is but one Sacrificer or Priest in the proper sense of the word, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ; who (as the establish'd Ministers in their Prayer of Consecration say) "made by one Oblation of
 "Himself once offered, a full, perfect and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction for
 "the Sins of the whole World. Now whoever assumes to himself a proper *Priesthood*, either invades the Office of the Son of God, or brings us back to a *Levitical Priesthood*, which is to suppose the Lamb of God is not yet slain, or has not yet made by one Oblation of himself once offered, a full perfect and sufficient Sacrifice for the Sins of the whole World; or else we must run into the Popish Notion of a Priest; one who turns a *bit of Bread* into the Son of God, and then Sacrificeth him. Wherefore Protestant Divines both at Home and Abroad, have always opposed the *Whim* of a real Priesthood. Now among Men, as there are therefore now no Priests but in a Metaphorical Sense, since our Sacrifices are only Metaphorical, so whenever
 we

we have mention of Priest in the New Testament, it is not strictly apply'd to Ministers, (those who affect to be distinguish'd by the Name of * Clergy, as tho' none were the Heritage of God but they) but to Christians in general, as 1 *Pet.* ii. 5. *Rev.* i. 5, 6. Now what are these Spiritual Sacrifices that these Priests are to offer up? nothing but Prayers and Praises, which in every Family ought to be offered up. What a Motive is this to the keeping up Family-Worship; this declares the House a Church, and the Master a Priest.

2. The keeping up Family-Prayer may be a good outward sign of a Person's having receiv'd the Grace of God, however the Neglect of it is too evident a Token of the contrary.

It's generally to be observ'd, that where Family-Duty is neglected, there is very little of the Fear of God in that House. For tho' many who have not the Grace of God in Deed and Truth, may yet for a time observe a round of Family-Prayer Morning and Evening; yet sure those who constantly neglect it, cannot lay claim to that Grace. I don't say all who perform this Duty are real Christians; but this I think I may venture to say that those who live in the constant Neglect of it are no Christians.

Would you therefore, my Friends, have the Evidence in your selves, and the Reputation among others of being true Christians, do not neglect Religion at Home, to serve God in your Houses. Men indeed should be cautious lest they make this a Matter of Ostentation, and

* *Κληρὸς.*

grow proud of their Services, for this will be no good sign of Grace. But, when it is observ'd in a humble manner / from a sense of our Obligation to the Duty, and there is a Conversation answerable, then I think it will declare that Persons have been made Partakers of the Divine Nature. He that has the Grace of God in his Heart, he won't be silent in his House. In general therefore it's a good outward Mark to know a Christian by, if he Prays in his Family.

3. How sad to have your Children and Servants reproach you with the neglect of Family-Religion, as the cause of their Wickedness and Ruine.

How many Children and Servants have been undone for want of the Exercise of Family-Religion, and a good Example set before them by Parents, and Masters. There are, I fear, many Heads of Families, (some it may be, of considerable ones) who have no regard to Family-Worship. Supposing now that your Children, for I will mention them as the most likely to affect you (tho' give me leave to tell you your Servants are as really your Charge and Care, and you are responsible for their Souls.) But, suppose your Children should prove bad and vile, turn to ill Courses, and it may be come to an ill End; (pardon me, it's a supposable Case) and it shou'd be ask'd them, how it came about that they took such bad ways, to bring themselves to such an unhappy End, and they should answer, the great Fault was my Parents, who did not Instruct me, nor Pray with me, and for me as they ought, but left me loose to my own Inclinations, never commanded me in to call upon God, or once, as I know of, pray'd to God

God for me. Now suppose this was any of your Lot, you who are Parents of Children, how do you think such a Message as this (sent from a Child that was going to suffer for his Crimes by the Executions of common Justice) would affect you.

‘ Dear Parents, I have now but a few Hours to
 ‘ live, but am going to receive the shameful Re-
 ‘ ward of my wicked Works ; I must confess that
 ‘ my own base Heart prompted me to take such
 ‘ wicked Courses ; but, alas ! I cannot but fear,
 ‘ you did very much contribute to it, that you
 ‘ did not restrain, reprove, instruct me, nor
 ‘ pray with me and for me as you ought ; but
 ‘ now, as the last Service you can do for me, if
 ‘ you have any love to my poor Soul, oh ! don’t
 ‘ neglect to pray for me. How wou’d such a
 Message as this strike you with Convictions, fill
 your Souls with the extreamest Horror, and most
 bitter Agonies. You wou’d be ready to die
 your selves at such a melancholy piece of News.
 It’s an ungrateful Subject I know, but pray think
 of it ; imagine this was your Case, and sure it
 must quicken you to the Observance of the Duty
 recommended. If you, my Friends, are *Atheists*
 in not Worshipping God, your Children
 may well be *Atheists* in denying God ; if you are
 defective in your Duty to God, they may well
 abound in Iniquity against him.

You neglect to pray to God for them, and
 God leaves them to commit the most notorious
 Villanies. Such Children may well say to you,
 bloody Parents have you been to us ; oh ! woe
 is me that I was born in a Prayerless Family ;
 had I seen more of Religion at Home, I had
 practised more of it Abroad : but alas ! I am un-
 done for ever.

If you now neglect this Duty, when you wou'd practise it, it may be you can't bring your House easily to it; after Children grow old, they'll grow stubborn and refractory, and you won't find it an easie thing to bow their Spirits, or make 'em fall in with a new course and Method.

In a late Book Entituled *The Family-Instructor*, you have an Account of a Family of Distinction, who had lived many Years in the neglect of Family-Worship, till the Children were grown up to Maturity. You can't conceive, when they came to set up Religion in their House, what opposition they met with from their Children, and with how much difficulty they brought 'em to acquiesce. It was reckon'd a new fancy, and strange thing, and they could not tell how to put up with it for a great while; nay, the Eldest Son, rather than submit to it, buys a Commission in the Army, is reduc'd to very great Hardships by his extravagance, and having his Arm shot off, is brought thereby under a pining Illness; at length he is brought home to his Parents, and kept by them privately, till recover'd. Afterwards he takes again to wicked Company and Courses; dies in a miserable Condition, Atheistical and Impenitent. Whether this Story be a Fiction of the Author's, or Matter of Fact, is not for me to dispute; I will suppose it to be the former, and it very well answers my Design in repeating, *viz.* to shew how dangerous it is to neglect Family-Religion too long: For though the Story be not Fact, the Moral of it is certainly just. See what the Neglect of Family-Religion so long did. So, my Friends, if you continue to live without it, you may expect the same Trouble in
 setting

setting it up. You'll have many Objections raised, and what you so earnestly desire, possibly you may never be able to bring about.

5. Your Example herein will have a mighty influence on your Families.

Practise is above Precept, and Example is much more engaging than Instruction. In vain will you bid your Children to Pray, if they see you live in the neglect of it. Methought it was an affecting Answer, when a Father was advising an inquisitive Child to Pray, to say, Why, Father, do you Pray? Do you hear this Parents. Think then, how cutting it will be, to have your Children and Servants lay their Faults at your Door, and charge you as the Cause of all their Sins, that they lived without God in the World, and never regarded their Duty to him, because they never saw you mind yours, and they thought, if they lived as you did, all wou'd be well. How do you by this means propagate Irreligion in the World? How will your Successors plead the Practise of their Ancestors? My Father never Prayed in his Family, and why should I. This is a Trade soon learnt. Would you then have your Children and Servants observe Prayer in their Houses, don't neglect it in yours; set 'em a good Example; use 'em now, as you wou'd have 'em hereafter. *Train up a Child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

*Quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem,
Testa Diu.*

Endeavour to give your Children an early sense of Religion, and their Duty to God, and when
D they

they grow up, it may be hoped that the Tincture will continue. If they see you mind your Duty, and Pray in your Family, they may possibly do so afterwards in theirs; this is accustoming them to do Good, inuring them to Duty. Oh! Sirs, as you act in this Affair, so its very likely your Children after you will; your Practice herein will be a Pattern and Precedent to them, which will be more likely to engage their observance, and have a greater influence on their after Behaviour, than all your Precepts and Exhortations. Consider well then what you do, that you may be an Example to your Children, in all Sobriety and Godliness.

6. Remember *Joshua's* Resolution, *Josh. xxiv. 15. As for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.* While others serve the Devil, and their own Lusts, this is my determination, that I and mine will serve the Lord; I will serve him in my House, and serve him with my House. Thus do you Christians, resolve, that, while others live without God, both in the World, and at Home, abroad and in their own Houses, you and yours, as far as you can influence them, will serve the Lord; keep up his Worship in your Houses, and endeavour to make his Name as desirable as may be to those about you. A true Christian studies as much as may be to promote the Glory of God, both in the World, and in his Family. He would fain have every one to love and worship his God, the God in whom he lives and moves, and has his Being and daily Bread, and therefore he speaks and acts for God in all Places, Capacities, and Relations; he adores God himself, and would have all around him to reverence and serve him. Hence he, above all things,
takes

takes care to maintain a Religious Oeconomy in his House, and will not live without the daily exercise of Prayer in his Family; the Lord increase the Number of these Praying Families. Oh! Christians resolve upon this Work, that while others are Houses of *Belial*, yours may be *Bethels*, Houses of God. While others are real Synagogues of Satan, where little else is heard but Oaths and Curses, and prophane Chat, let your Houses be Temples of God, holy Places sanctified by Praise and Prayer; let God be worshiped in them, and he will dwell in them; and tho' others may reproach your Zeal for God, never heed that, God approves what you do, and he will reward you for it.

7. Consider the apparent advantage of it to those Families where the Duty is kept up.

If your Houses are *Bethel's* Houses of God, they shall also be *Peniel's* places where his glorious Face will be seen. Remember how God blessed the House of *Obed-Edom* for the *Ark* sake, 2 *Sam.* vi. 11, 12. You can't conceive Christians, the many Advantages of Family-Prayer, how many Inconveniences are prevented by it, how many Benefits come by it. This promotes Love, reconciles Differences, prevents the Sun's going down on Persons Anger. If there has been any Jars in a Family, Prayer sets all to rights again; this composes the Minds, and engageth the Hearts of the several Members in a House. When I hear a Person wrestling with God in Prayer for my poor Soul, this must needs pacifie me towards him, and tend to endear him much to me; all Anger and undue Resentments must cease; one joint hearty *Amen* in a Family-Prayer, facilitates Peace, and accomplishes a Reconciliation a-

mong contending Parties. To enumerate all the Blessings of Family-Prayer, would require more Skill and more Time than I am Master of. You may compare the Advantages of it, with the Punishments threatned to the neglect of it, as sum'd up and compriz'd in the Fury of God, and so you may guess a little at 'em ; such shall be blessed in their Persons, Relations, Estates, both as to Time, and as to Eternity. Read *Deuteron. 28.* you have a Catalogue both of Blessings and Curses, which you may respectively apply to the Observers or Neglecters of this Duty. *The Curse of the Lord is in the House of the Wicked, but he bleisseth the Habitation of the Just,* Prov. iii. 33.

It will be worth your while to read *Psal. cxv. 12, 13, 14, 15.* *The voice of Rejoycing and Salvation is in the Tabernacles of the Righteous,* *Psal. cxviii. 15.* God loves to visit Pious Families ; they who seek his Face, shall see his Face. Oh ! how many Family-Prayers has God answer'd ? Persons in Distress have called their Families to Prayer, and have had immediate Relief. Before they have called as it were, God has answered, and while they have been yet speaking, he has heard. I cou'd produce you Instances if need were, it may be your own Experiences will furnish you out some.

Oh ! what Family now would be without Prayer ; would to God I could perswade you all to set up Family-Prayer in your Houses. I am sure if you consulted your own Interest you wou'd do it.

8. Those who don't Pray in their Families, are unfit to come to the Lord's Table.

Family-

Family-Religion, is the very Life of Religion, and without it the outside Form and Shew will soon vanish away. If a Man can't be a Christian without keeping up Family-Worship, (and I must declare he who lives in the constant neglect of it, in my Opinion, will have much ado to prove himself one) then the Consequence is undeniable that he has no right to the Lord's Table. It is not to be disputed whether Christians only ought to partake of this Sacrament; it's generally believ'd they only ought, tho' some practise otherwise; but the great Difficulty is to know who is a Christian; there may be many cognizable Marks given, but I am fit to think, this is as generally sure as any, *viz.* a constant regard to Family Worship.

Is Family-Prayer so easie and plain a Duty, as well as so necessary and useful a one, who then that calls himself Christian, can live without it? He who does believe in Jesus, will be careful among other, to maintain this good Work. If a Man then is to examine himself before he comes to the Lord's Supper, I think this is one Material thing that he should examine himself about, Whether he have a real conscientious regard to Family-Worship. Oh! that I cou'd perswade every one that hears me this Day, to set immediately about this Duty. There is nothing so great an Objection against many of you having receiv'd the grace of God into your Hearts, nothing that can hinder you from coming and being welcome to the Lord's Table, but the wretched woful Neglect of this so easie and obvious Duty of Family-Prayer. The Lord incline your Hearts to set about this Work without delay.

9. Consider how dreadful the Fury of God is.

And you can't tell this better, than by considering what his Favour is. Is his Favour Life! then his Fury must be Death, nay worse than Death; as his loving Kindness is better than Life. You can think of nothing so dismal, terrifying and affrighting as what is contain'd in the Fury of God. If the Wrath of a King be as the roaring of a Lion, what must the Fury of God be! for all that the one can do, is only to kill the Body, but God can destroy both Soul and Body in Hell for ever. Whatever therefore is to be dreaded, as to Time or Eternity, is contain'd in the Fury of God, and *who can stand when once he is angry. Now will this Fury of God be poured on the Families that call not on God's Name*; then what a powerful Motive is this to the exercise of Family-Prayer; who that thinks of it, dare live without it? If any therefore live in the constant neglect of this Duty, either they don't believe that God will pour his Fury upon them, or don't think what the Fury of God is.

4. I am now to answer Objections.

The more material any Duty is, and the more the Life of Religion is contain'd in it, the more is it generally contested. The Devil will furnish in a thousand Objections against, and throw a variety of Obstructions in the way, if what we are exhorted to Practise, be a Duty of Importance, tending to promote the glory of God, and for the furtherance of Practical Religion in the World; and hence the observance of this Duty of Family-Prayer meets with so much Difficulty and Opposition.

The

The more common Objections I take to be these Four.

Some will say there is no need of it.

Others, I han't time for it.

Others again, I am aſham'd to perform it.

And others, I han't a Gift. The Sum is, either I won't, I durſt not, or I can't perform it.

1. Some may ſay there is no need of it.

I am not ſatisfy'd that the Obſervance of this Duty is neceſſary, I don't think it ſo material to ſet about it. In Answer to this, I had like to have ſaid, I don't think the Objection ſo material to deſerve a Refutation. I am at a loſs what to make of it, and can ſcarce think that any but a very wicked or weak Perſon would raiſe ſuch a Scruple. However, to ſay ſomething to it, I beg leave to ask a Queſtion or two of ſuch Perſons.

1. Do you really believe in your Conſciences that there is no neceſſity for the keeping up Family-Prayer? Is this indeed a Scruple, or is it not rather an Excuse, ſomething that you advance to evade the praſtiſe of the Duty, and if it it were poſſible, to lull Conſcience aſleep? I am afraid of ſome ſuch thing, and I beſeech you examine your own Hearts about it.

Again, have you never ſome ſecret Troubles of Conſcience for the Neglect of this Duty? Does not ſomething within, ſometimes make you uneaſie

easy for your constant Omission? again, dare you say it's necessary to live in the total Neglect of Family-Prayer? If not, then it must needs be safest to observe it, at most, if you should be mistaken in thinking it necessary, it's an Error on the right Hand ; for it's neither very tedious nor painful to perform it. But to bring the Matter to a point.

I do assert it's necessary to observe it, and so necessary, that I can't see how that Family can properly be called Christian, where it is constantly omitted. Besides, the best Christians in all Ages have thought it necessary to keep it up; as I might instance in *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Job, David*, our Lord himself, *Cornelius*, and the most renowned Christians since the Apostles Times ; all which observ'd this Duty, and if it were not necessary, they would hardly have done it. Further,

As the practise of this Duty has declin'd, so in proportion Religion, I mean practical Religion in General. I need only appeal to your own Experiences for the Truth of this.

Again, if our Text be true, it's so necessary, that those who live without it, do expose themselves manifestly to a dreadful Curse. Nay, I might argue the necessity of it, from the necessity of secret Prayer, which no one will dare to deny. Add to this, that Persons affecting to juggle the Duty out, by attending Prayers at Church, shews, as I conceive, a conviction, that at least, it is very convenient. Nay, I am farther satisfied that none of you would think it unnecessary to keep up Family-Worship, if you had no conveniency of Worshipping God any where else ; and why, I pray, must your Eye be Evil, because God's is Good? But then if
your

your Family be in any considerable Trouble, you think it necessary to Pray, or obtain some body else to Pray with them, and for them; and what Day is there that you are without Wants, why then is it not necessary every Day?

In the last place, you that pretend to doubt whether the practise of this Duty be necessary, let me ask, do you think it necessary that you should be Saved? but you'll say this Scruple won't hinder it, I can't tell that; without Prayer, I believe, no one can be Saved; and if Persons be of Opinion that Family-Prayer is needless, and so live in the neglect of it, for ought I know they may have the same Opinion of Prayer in General; for it's very suspicious whether those Worship God sincerely in publick, or at all in their Closets, that worship not God in and with their Families.

Besides, for Persons to pretend to observe Prayer as they ought, in one respect, and not in another, is an Inconsistency that I am not able to account for. But to put the Matter close, would you not have your Families, as well as your selves, saved?

Then, whether Family-Prayer be necessary, Judge ye: but,

2. Some may say I have not Time to perform it; my Business is of that Nature, that I have not Leisure to call my Family together to Prayer; I should suffer considerable loss by it.

I am afraid this is but an Evasion to shift off the performance of the Duty. Is this Objection real Matter of Fact in your own Apprehensions? take heed of a Lye in your right Hand. I am perswaded some make Business an Excuse to neglect

lest their Duty to God, when there is nothing hinders but their accursed disinclination to the performance of the Duty it self. But what can we say to that Business, which won't give a Man time to Mind his Duty to God ; that's a poor Drudge indeed, that's so taken up with the World ; if one Season you are so busie that you can't spare time, you can't sure be always so taken up, and you are not confin'd to an Hour. Besides, it is not so much time that this Duty would take up, and will you be so sollicitous about a few Minutes ? You are seldom so busie but you can find time for your Meals, and for many other things of lesser importance, and why not for this Duty ? You can pay needless Visits, and find time for impertinent Talk in your House, and why not for Prayer ? Persons are seldom so hurried in Business, as to neglect their times of Eating and Drinking ; aye, but you'll say these are necessary to support Nature ; pray don't Grace want some supports too ? I believe if we were to compare Nature and Grace, we should find that the one wanted a daily Supply as much as the other. But here's the Infelicity, Men prefer generally the Body to the Soul, and the cravings of the sensual Appetite are more strong and violent, than those of the Spiritual. In short, Men have a sharper Appetite to their Natural than Spiritual Food, or else they would find time to Pray as well as Eat with their Families.

But I would farther beg leave to ask, whether you really think you should suffer any Damage by a little Time taken up in Prayer with your Families ; it's a poor Case if you can't retrieve a few Minutes ; nay, I must be so free to tell you, it's my Opinion, that you get more by a little Time spent in Prayer, than you do by the Work
and

and Fatigue of many Hours; so that your Practise at best, is but like the old Proverb, *To be Penny Wise, and Pound Foolish*; afraid of losing a little Time in Prayer, and lose the Advantage of many Hours for want of it; for if you han't Time to call upon God for a Blessing on your Endeavours, you may Labour and Toil all your Days, and your Families be never the Richer after all; *The Diligent Hand without the Blessing of God will not make Rich.* Prov. x. 4. and can you expect a Blessing without asking it?

If therefore you use the one, don't neglect to seek the other. This is the great Reason why you Labour and Toil, and get no more, *James iv. 2. Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and War, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.* Now make the Experiment, set apart a little time every Day out of your secular and common Employ to call upon God with your Family, and see if you don't thrive better for it. But should you get Riches, notwithstanding your Neglect of this Duty, you'll want a Blessing with them, and it may be, have more Trouble in keeping them, than you had in getting them, or however making Gain your Godliness, you secure the World your Portion, and by missing such Seasons for Eternity, you lose more than all your Estates are worth. Think then, while you are thus busie for the Body, and this World, what must become of the Soul, if you make Worldly Business to juggle Religion out of your Houses.

You may get Estates, for ought I know, but you'll lose your precious Souls. Remember what became of them who neglected the King's Supper, to pursue their Worldly Affairs, *Matth. xxii.* at the beginning. I beseech you compare well, and

consider, what is said in these following Places, *Luke* x. 41, 42. *Mat.* xvi. 26. But to come to an end as to this Objection; let me argue with you a little upon the Ingenuous Point. Is it not a poor Case that the World must have all your Time, and God none? What Treatment is this of your Creator and Lord! is this Just, is it grateful! to give God none of your Time, who gives you Time, and every thing else. I beg you would consider of it, and don't withhold God's Due from him. Why, you'll say, I give him his own Day. It's well indeed God has appointed one Day in Seven for Rest, otherwise, some would never serve God at all.

But, I believe you think God should have a little of your Time too. Well then, to bring the Matter to a Composition, for I had rather comply to lesser Terms, than lose all my Pains; do you but give God as much of your Time in the Six Days, as you take from him of the Lord's Day, and I am confident some of you would owe him Time for Family-Prayer Morning and Evening.

I have now done with this Objection: what do you think of the Matter? have you Time, or have you not? weigh well what has been said, and then give your impartial Judgment on the Case; and if, upon the whole, you think you may have Time, pray make use of it without Delay.

3. Some may say I am ashamed to Pray in my Family.

I have a Wife, Children, and Servants, that would be apt to banter and ridicule such a Practice, and this makes be backward.

I am

I am almost ashamed, when I think that such an Objection as this should be made against the practise of a Duty so plain and necessary ; but, such is the sinful Bashfulness of Men, as to the Things of God ; that, were I to ask many here, why they don't keep up this Duty of Family-Prayer ; I know a considerable Number would tell me it's nothing but shamefacedness. O wretched pusillanimity ! what ashamed to act in your Families as you ought ! I am sure this betrays a Spirit unfit for Government ; be ashamed if thou hast lost thy Authority, but be not ashamed to resume it again in such a Cause as this.

I hope none here can say, that they have Wives who would make a Jest of Family-Worship ; no sober Woman will dare to do it ; and as to Children and Servants, you have an easie way to bring them into better Manners, by convenient Correction. Nay, if you have any such prophane Wretches in your Family, a greater Necessity is laid on you to Pray with them, and for them. Thus *Abraham* did, *Oh ! that Ishmael might live before thee.* Gen. xvii. 18. But again, you exercise Authority in other Cases, and why not in this ? Why can't you as easily command your Servants to attend Family-Prayer, as to mind their daily Work ? aye, and to enjoin Reverence at the one, as well as Diligence in the other ? Oh ! say no longer I am ashamed, for I am perswaded, some that make this Objection, an't ashamed to Swear, and Lye, and do a great many unseemly and wicked Actions in their Families. But, you will say, this is one Reason that makes me ashamed, because I am no better ; why then labour after a more regular and holy Conversation, that your walk may be Ornamental,

tal, however not a Scandal to your Duty; for indeed it may well 'make a Man asham'd, to maintain a constant round of Family-Prayer, and at the same time, indulge the Practise of the most scandalous Immoralities; to hear Persons, as he goes along the Streets, say of him, there goes a Man that keeps up Prayer in his Family, and yet has no regard to common Honesty; a poor griping Covetous Wretch, and Knave in Masquerade; but if still Bashfulness prevail, Custom would soon wear it off, and you would go on in your Duty with a great deal of ease and pleasure; 'tis but assuming Courage for the first a little, resolving upon the Duty a while, and all Bashfulness would cease; had we more Resolution, we should soon get Master of this Objection; but here is the misery of it, we are very cold and indifferent as to the Duty it self, and so a very little thing serves for an Excuse; but I beseech you, before I leave this Argument, remember what our Lord says, *Mark viii. 38.* which may be apply'd to the *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be asham'd when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with his holy Angels.* I hope now Bashfulness will no longer be an Objection. But,

4. And lastly, some may say, I can't Pray, I have not a Gift.

I am satisfy'd of the Duty, and desire nothing more than to be able to keep it up in my House, but I would not, through my Weakness and Folly, expose both my self and the Duty to Contempt. You say now you can't Pray; you would gladly set up this Duty in your Family, but
have

have not a Gift suited to it. Go Home and tell God so, make your Complaints known to him, 'tis he only can redress this Grievance.

But then, I would further observe, that unless you endeavour for a Gift, and make use of what Attainments you have, you are never like to have any valuable one. Little Grace grows by Use; small Ability to Pray will encrease by Exercise; Habits are both acquired and improved this way. How many Persons, of very mean Gifts and Knowledge, have by practise arrived to an eminent Gift of Prayer. But besides, you know God does not hear for much speaking; a few words from a sincere humble Soul will be accepted. See what Prayer *Hezekiah*, and the *Publican*, sent up to God, *Isa.* xxxviii. 14, 15. *Luke* xviii. 13. and yet God heard them. Let not your Pride then hinder your observing your Duty to God in your Family; because you have not so good a Gift as some others, don't cease Praying at all. But, you will say, alas! I am not able to utter a sensible word scarce, and it won't become me to expose my self in my Family: Why if it be really so, compose some Form of your own out of the Word of God, and make use of it till you can do better; Prayer by *such* a Form is certainly better than none at all; and Compositions of this nature, can never be judg'd improper in such a Case. I make no doubt but there may be true Grace in the Heart, where there is but a very small measure of Ability for Prayer; and on the other side, a Man may have the Gift of Prayer, who has not the Spirit of Prayer; and therefore I cannot but think that *such* Forms may be very proper to assist a weak Gift, and useful, especially in publick Prayer;
but

but (as one observes) * *for any one to set down and satisfy himself with Book-Prayer, or any prescript Form so as to go no farther, this were still to remain in his Infancy, and not to grow up in his new Nature; this would be as if a Man who had once need of Crutches, should always afterwards make use of them, and so necessitate himself to a continual Impotence.*

Wherefore that you may be able to Pray, without confining your self to the use of any pre-compos'd Form of Words, I advise you to Pray more in your Closets, and there beg that God would incline and assist you to Pray in your Families. *Lord teach us to Pray*, was a noble Prayer of the Disciples, *Luke xi. 1.* and then frequent Christian Society, converse with Godly Praying Families, this will be a help to you. Not only as their Example may have an influence, but as their Conversation may be assisting to you, in this great Work. This will make you emulous and studious to excell: Farther, study more the wants of your Family, what Wants, Temptations and Afflictions you may one and another of you be under, and this will teach you to Pray. Necessity wants no words. See your need of God's Supply, and you will not be at a loss how to ask him for it.

To conclude as to this, read the word of God often, and that will teach you how to Pray. No wonder you Pray no better, when you read so little; if you are barren in your Addresses to the Throne of Grace, 'tis because you so seldom consult the Word of Grace. You have there

* *Wilkins of the Gift of Prayer, page 9.*

Precepts, Promises, and Threatnings, which you may turn into Prayers, Pleas, and Deprecations. Wherefore don't say I can't Pray, but read God's Word, and that will help you.

Thus much in answer to the Objections, wherein I have used some Sharpness, as well as great plainness of Speech. Some may be ready to think that Limitations in the close would be proper, but People are naturally apt to fall short themselves, and I am unwilling to come under the Censure that my Lord Falkland put upon some, when speaking of the Prelates of Charles the First's time, he tells us, *their Work was to try how much of the Papist might be brought in without Popery, and to destroy as much as they could of the Gospel, without bringing themselves into danger of being destroy'd by Law;* or as Sir Thomas Moon said of the Casuists, *Their Business was not to keep Men from Sinning, but to inform them.*

Quam prope ad peccatum sine peccato liceat accedere.

How nigh they might venture without becoming Guilty. The Reference is easie.

Upon the whole, let me only desire you to consider whether these Objections will be good Excuses another Day. When God, in the great Judgment Day, shall ask, why you neglected to Pray in your Families; whether you will dare to say, or think it will do. " Lord, I
 " did not think it was necessary, I had not
 " Time, I was ashamed, I had not a Gift.
 Suppose you was now a dying, for then is the

best time to judge impartially of Things, and had the immediate prospect of another World before you; you are brought under deep and smarting Convictions for your neglect of Family-Prayer, do you believe these Excuses would solve the Matter, satisfy Conscience, and make you easie? Nay would it not rather be a Comfort to you on a Death-Bed, both concerning your self and Family, that you have done your Duty, and endeavour'd to shew them theirs?

I come now, in the last place, to apply what I have said.

Application is the very Life of a Sermon; it is this that brings the Matter home, and tends greatly to fasten Convictions on the Conscience. *Nathan's* plain Parable of the Ewe Lamb, had never affected *David* in any sensible manner, if he had not made that particular Application to him, *Thou art the Man*, 2 Sam. 12. beginning.

I have, I think, been pretty close already in what I have said; but if I was particularly to point at the Guilty Persons, and say, thou and thou art the Man, as I could to many, I make no doubt but the Discourse would be more startling still; but Prudence bids me forbear, lest I should rather exasperate than reform.

However, give me leave to apply what I have offer'd.

1. By way of Inference.

1. Then, hence we learn that the observance of Family-Prayer is not so trifling and insignificant as some may imagine.

Some

Some may say, what ado is here about a Form of House-Worship; we Pray in our Closets, and in the Church, and that's enough. There are many good Christians that don't think themselves bound every day to interrupt the Course of their Affairs, by calling together their Families to Prayer; and why should this thing be so strenuously insisted on? A Man may be Saved without it. To this I might answer in general, only varying the words that were spoken to *Peter* in his Trance, *What God has cleansed, that call not thou common*, Acts x. 15. What God has commanded, that reckon not thou indifferent, but remember to enforce his own Command; he has said, *he will pour out his Fury on the Families that call not on his Name*. But to render the Practise of this Duty yet more unnecessary, it's said, that many good Christians live without it, and that the neglect of it will not hinder a Person's Salvation.

As to the former part of the Assertion, I have this to Answer: You'll find it not so easie as you may think, to prove that many good Christians live in the constant neglect of Family-Prayer. How can you know a Man is a Christian, but by his walk? *the Tree is known by its Fruit*. The Language of every Christian is, *Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?* in form me what thy Will is, and by thy Grace I will conform to it. *Pray in thy Family*, says God; dare a Christian then, either say I will not, or I will, and never do it. Now if a Man live in the constant Omission of this so known a Duty, what must we think of him? To assert he is no Christian may seem very harsh, and yet to prove that

that he is one, against so weighty an Objection, I want Arguments. For I can't see how a Man can have any Religion in his Heart, and shew none in his House. But suppose a Man may be a Christian that neglects it, and some such do so. There are I am perswaded many more who do observe it, and I think the Majority in this Case should determine. We should chuse rather to follow many Persons in the exercise of a Duty, than suffer the Neglects of a few to be a Pattern to us.

But as to the other Assertion, that a Man may be Saved without observing this Duty.

I won't enter into a particular Disquisition of that Matter, whether it be so or no; though methinks our Text don't favour the Assertion. But supposing it to be so.

It shews, I think, no great Wisdom, for a Man to venture his Soul's Salvation upon a bare possibility; this is the most you can say of it, that a Man may be Saved without it; but you will allow me, that a Man may smart very severely for it here; and then I would farther observe, that it betrays a poor narrow Spirit, when Persons are determin'd to do no more than just what they think will comport with their Interest, and neglect every thing that will not absolutely hazard their eternal Salvation. Nay, give me leave, to close up the Argument with this, that those who upon such a presumption, indulge themselves in the Neglect of this Duty, may find themselves mistaken at last; and then think what a sad Case they will be in. Put the Affair then upon an equal Ballance, weigh the Advantages, Prospects, Encouragements on both Sides, and so give your Judgments of the Matter.

2. From the Doctrine I infer the sad and miserable Case of those who never Pray at all.

If God will pour out his Fury on the Families, much more on the Persons who call not on his Name; who neither in their Closets, their Families, or the Church, pray to God. These can have no Cloak for their Sin, but must expect full Vials of Wrath, and the heaviest Loads of Woe to fall upon them. You poor Sinners, who never Prayed seriously and sincerely for your selves, it may be, in your whole Lives, allow me to put up one short but hearty Request for you; the Lord have mercy upon your neglected Souls! and oh! how many such have I need to Pray for! You now live, Sirs, without Prayer, but it will not be so upon a Death-Bed; then you'll *howl to God*, (as himself expresses it, *Hosea vii. 14.*) Lord have mercy upon me, &c. but it will be too late, *Prov. i. 26, 27, 28.* Consider well what is said, *Job xxvii. 9. Isa. i. 15.* and fear lest this should be your Lot.

2. I would offer a word or two by way of Re-proof, to those who yet live in the total Omision of Family-Prayer.

These may be reproved of Ingratitude, Injustice, Unnaturalness, and Unkindness.

You are ungrateful to God, who, when he bestows so many Favours and Blessings on you and your Families, will not answer so easie a Request, and comply with so reasonable a Demand as this is, to Pray in and with your Families.

You are unjust to your selves, by depriving your selves of many Mercies you might have, and exposing your selves to many Evils, through the neglect of this Duty.

You

You are unnatural to your Families, because you don't take a due Care of them, you don't provide what is necessary, but starve their poor precious Souls, 1 *Tim.* v. 8.

You are unkind to me, who, when I have taken so much pains to perswade you to set up Prayer in your Houses, still live in the woful and total Neglect of it, as though you were determin'd to pour Contempt on all I have said from this Subject. I can tell you, if I had had no more regard to your Interest, than my own Ease, I would not have taken so much pains on this Subject. But have I spent all this Time, Study and Strength for nought? I have, I hope, acquitted my self, and do you look to your selves; you can't say you was not told of this Duty

God and you are my Witnesses, that I have dealt both plainly and sharply with you in this Matter; and I am not without some encouragement that what I now offer, will have an Influence upon Sober, Considerate, and Ingenuous Minds.

3. I conclude with something by way of Exhortation: And,

1. To those who make Conscience of the performance of this Duty, a few Words.

1. Don't trust to the bare performance of the Duty.

Take heed of depending on the Work done; you may Pray often, and yet to very little purpose; it is a right Principle and End, that will render the performance of the Duty valuable. If
you

you do it from a Principle of Duty, and Love to God, as your great Preserver and King ; and with a Design to encourage and promote the Glory of God, and the power of Religion in your Families, and the World; this is keeping up Prayer to good purpose. But if you are determin'd only by Custom or Education, because your Ancestors did so, and you see others do it now ; if you have an Eye only to the pleasing of Men, or your own private Gain ; much more if you do it as a Cloak to cover your scandalous Sins ; altho' you may make many Prayers, God will not regard you ; yea, though you cry and shout, he will shut out your Prayers. Many lose the Benefit of their Prayers, for want of right Principles and Ends.

2. Look to the Manner how you Pray.

Let it be with Sincerity and Seriousness Faith and Fervour, Reverence and Humility, Delight, Pleasure, and Universal Charity ; and so, as to the outward manner, that others may easily join with you, let your Expressions be Familiar and apt, such as may be readily understood, and yet above Contempt ; your Gesture Grave and Comely, your Voice Smooth and Audible, neither too low, nor too loud, such as cannot be heard, nor ungratefully noisie.

3. Chuse a fit Season.

The right Timing of a Duty is a very useful Thing.

A Duty perform'd in a convenient Season, oh, how agreeable and pleasant is it !

Let

Let your Families be called together in the properest Time, don't put this Duty off till the last; too many do so, they make it the last thing they do, and so fall upon their Knees, when they are more fit to lie down upon their Beds. A Family can't be fit to Pray, when their Spirits are almost exhausted, through the Fatigues of the Day; the Flesh then becomes weak and unfit for Duty; such can neither watch unto Prayer, nor in Prayer; wherefore, see that you chuse a fit time for the performance of this Duty, while the Spirits are brisk and lively, and you may have reason to hope that your Family will attend. But then, if possible, let your Times for Prayer be stated, that none in your House may be absent, or plead ignorance of the Time, as an Excuse for non-attendance.

4. See that you act consistently with Prayer.

Let not your Conversation be a Scandal to your Duty; don't think that Praying in your Families, will atone for your looseness and extravagance in the World. You Praying Sinners! either give over Sinning, or give over Praying; but why should I say this, Sin will either drive out Prayer, or Prayer will drive out Sin. For *what Communion has Light with Darkeness, what Concord can there be between Christ and Belial.*

5. Hold on in your Duty, *Job xxvii. 10. Will the Hypocrite always call upon God?* How many will not be brought to it, how many have been brought to leave it off. Oh! be not weary of this well-doing, hold out in your Duty to the
End.

End. Let it not be said of any of you as to this Duty, you did run well, who did hinder you? who has bewitched you, that you should discontinue this Duty? Having begun in the Spirit, oh! don't end in the Flesh. *Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in this work of the Lord, forasmuch as your Labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*

2. I would say something to those who live in the constant omission of this Duty of Family-Prayer. Let me have the Honour of perswading you to seek your own Interest. I beseech you, if you value your selves and Families, live no longer in the Neglect of this Duty; it is for the Salvation of your Souls, the Health of your Bodies, the Improvement of your Families, the Flourishing of your Affairs, to mind it. I would beg leave to offer a few things to your Consideration.

You have Reason, Scripture, Example, and Interest, all plead for it. The Heathens themselves had their *Household Gods*; the Nature of Society obligeth to it. Is not Social Worship a Duty, and are not Families so many distinct Societies? Nay, does not the Word of God seem to warrant the practise of this Duty? The Institution of the *Daily Burnt-Offering*, has a plain regard to this, *Numb. xxviii. 3.* and some think that the *Psalmist* has a reference to this, when he says, *Psalms cxli. 2. Let my Prayer be set before thee as Incense; and the lifting up of my Hands as the Evening Sacrifice.* But then, how many Instances have we in Scripture, of Persons Praying in their Families; every one of which is a Mo-

tive to excite us to the Observance of the Duty. Nay, 'tis this that procures and sweetens Family-Mercies, averts Family - Judgments, prevents Broils, promotes Love, cherishes good Desires and Designs, Fences against early Corruptions, and propagates serious Religion in Families. Besides, some have been Converted, others Comforted and Confirmed by the means of Family-Prayer; God has often owned it in a distinguishing manner, afforded an uncommon presence of himself in it; and sure all these Considerations should engage to set about it. But further, Praying Families are a Blessing to a Nation. They are a Blessing, in that God often has a regard to a City or Nation upon their Account. *Abraham* in his Pleadings with God for *Sodom*, makes use of this Argument, *Far be it from thee to slay the Righteous with the Wicked*, Gen. xviii. 25. Accordingly we find that *Sodom* could not be destroy'd, 'till praying *Lot* and his Family was remov'd. Thus Praying Families are a Blessing: but again, they are so, as their Example has a tendency to promote Religion and good Manners, in a City or Nation.

Religion begins first in Families, and so diffuseth through more publick Communities; this tends to propagate Religion from Father to Children, and from one Member of the Society to another. The Example of Governors and Masters has a prodigious Influence; Praying Families then appear to be, both the Honour and Defence of a People; for *Righteousness exalteth a Nation; but Sin is a Reproach to any People*, Prov. xiv. 34. but then, how lovely and amiable is the thing it self! What more Beautiful than a Family
where

where constant Prayer and Praise is kept up are not these like so many little Churches, in which God will delight to dwell ? Nay, are they not a Resemblance of Heaven it self ? Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is for Members of Families thus to dwell together in Holy Communion ! but besides, how many Sins are hereby prevented, when Masters, in the Morning, Pray with and for their Families; that *God would not lead them into Temptation, but deliver them from Evil ?* how often do these Prayers prevail for them ? You are not able to know how many Sins might be prevented in your Families through your Prayers with them, and for them. No wonder if God suffer Prophaneness to spread in your House, when you restrain Prayer in such a horrid manner as many of you do. It's related of *Origen*, that having fallen into the Hands of Heathenish Officers, and (thro' Temptation and fear of Violence) having bowed to the Heathenish Idols, he afterwards (when he came to himself) sadly bewailed his Sin, and confessed, he went out that Morning without praying to God.

See now, Prayerless Families, how many Snares and Temptations you expose your selves and Families to. I am perswaded, many a Sin, Snare, and Fall might be prevented, if serious and fervent Prayer to God had not been omitted. Methinks this should be a mighty Motive to you, to set up this Worship in your Houses.

But besides, pray consider, that Sins of Omission, will fill up a principal part of the Indictment against us, in the great Judgment Day.

See *Matth.* xxv. 41, 42, &c. When God therefore shall ask you, why you omitted this Duty, what will you be able to offer in Plea for your selves? Consider, what an Influence would this have on your own Peace, to keep up the practise of this Duty. If thou hast but one Dram of Grace, and yet livest in the Neglect of this Duty, thy Conscience must needs fly in thy Face, and make thee both afraid and ashamed. In Fine, consider what an Influence this may have upon others, either in Blessing or Cursing you. Your Children may rise up and call you Blessed; or Curse the Day of their Birth, according as you live in the Performance or Omission of Family Prayer. Your Neglects will give too great occasion to the Enemies of Religion to Blaspheme. What will many say to it? here is a Professor mighty Devout at Church, would fain set up for somebody in Religion, one uncommonly Serious and Attentive; but, follow him into his Family, and you will see no Religion, no not so much as the Form, within Doors. Not a Prayer put up in the House for many Years; it may be never a Bible in the House; or if there be one, it's seldom lookt into.

What a Reproach is this to a Religious Profession! This is the Man that pretends to be more strict and precise than his Neighbours, and yet all his Religion lies without Doors. By him, you may judge of the rest; and if your Neglects will have such an Influence on By-standers, what do you think your Children and Servants will say to it? They will Curse the Day that ever they were born into the World,

World, and came under your Roof. Oh! that I had lived in a Heathen, rather than in this Christian Family, where serious Godliness seems to be turn'd out of Doors, and there is neither Christian, *Priest*, *Altar*, nor *Sacrifice*. Where I never heard a Chapter read, Psalm Sung, or Prayer offered to God in all my Time.

Now on the contrary, a conscientious Observance of this Duty, would not only tend mightily to propagate Religion among those about you, but would engage your Children and Servants to Praise the Lord, and Bless you, that their Lot was cast in such a happy Place, and that they had such a good Example set before them.

Methinks these Considerations, added to the many Arguments used before, should provoke you to the setting up this Duty in your Houses. The Lord in infinite Mercy grant, that what has been offered, may have this Influence on you.

But if after all, you will not be wrought upon to practice this Duty, but still are determin'd to live in the Neglect of it, I have only two Words to say to you, and so leave you.

1. Remember I told you your Duty, and I am clear. See *Ezek. iii. 17. to 22.*

2. Consider you must give an Account to God for this Sermon.

And what Account will you be able to give of it, if it have no influence on your
Practise,

Practise, touching the Duty in it, so warmly recommended to you. If you therefore now live in the Neglect of this Duty, it will not be sufficient another Day that you, like the Foolish Virgins, shall cry *Lord, Lord, open to us*; for you will have but the same Answer that they had, *I know you not.*



F I N I S.
